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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROMOTES REFUGEE HEALTH PROGRAMS

(Richmond, Va.)— The Virginia Department of Health Refugee Health Program is encouraging awareness of refugee health services in Virginia for World Refugee Day, June 20. Generally, a refugee is a person who has fled his or her country because of fear of persecution. The United Nations General Assembly designated June 2000 as the first World Refugee Day to recognize and celebrate the contribution of refugees throughout the world. Since then, World Refugee Day has become an annual commemoration marked by a variety of events in over a hundred countries.

The Health Department's Refugee Health Program operates within the Division of Tuberculosis Control and facilitates the provision of medical screening services to newly entering refugees migrating into the Commonwealth. Tuberculosis is one condition for which entering refugees are screened. The Refugee Health Program also helps new comers navigate the necessary forms, immunizations and screenings required upon entry into Virginia.

"Coming into a new country and culture can be overwhelming for refugees," explained State Health Commissioner, Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "It is important that we try to make the transition easier while ensuring the health and safety of entering refugees and the citizens of the commonwealth."

Working closely with local health departments, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and voluntary agencies across the state, the Refugee Health Program is able to assist hundreds of refugees in their resettlement process each year. Between 1997 and 2002, 10,488 refugees entered Virginia from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The Refugee Health Program completed 1,452 health assessments in 2001.

This year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will commemorate World Refugee Day with the theme of *Refugee Youth - Building the Future*. "This year's theme reminds us of the importance of providing essential health care to refugee youth," noted Anna Davis, R.N., Refugee Health Program Coordinator. "Many of these young people have fled very dismal conditions. By ensuring that they receive the health care they need when they arrive in Virginia, we offer them a brighter, more productive future while protecting the health of all Virginians."

For more information on World Refugee Day, events go to <http://www.unrefugees.org/>. To learn more about the Refugee Health Program go to <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/epi/tb/index.htm>.

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